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## ***Ten Escape from Tojo***



# *Ten Escape from Tojo*

*by*

Commander Melvyn H. McCoy, USN

*and*

Lieutenant Colonel S. M. Mellnik, USA

*as told to*

Lieutenant Welbourn Kelley, USNR

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## ***Ten Escape from Tojo***





# I

## *Defeat in the Philippines*

IN WAR, casualties are expected. Some men are killed outright. Others are wounded but recover. Still others lose an arm, a leg, or are mutilated in other ways, and they bear the scars or pains of this mutilation for the rest of their lives. These grim consequences of war are accepted as a part of war's terrible custom and tradition.

It is also a custom and tradition of war that, when men fight honorably and are forced to lay down their arms in surrender, the war for them has reached an end. As helpless prisoners of war, such men do not expect to be pampered. But they do expect enough food, shelter, clothing and medical care to keep them alive. They do expect reasonably decent treatment from their captors, and they do expect their captors to treat them as human beings. These things they expect under the comity of nations which decrees that there can be honor even among peoples which are at war.

For the 65,000 men who were overpowered and

forced to lower the American flag on Bataan and Corregidor, in the Philippines, the enemy provided new rules. Or, rather, those rules of humanity which had been built up in the past were completely ignored or deliberately forgotten.

We are two of the Americans who were captured by the Japanese in the fall of Corregidor. With eight others, we were the first to escape from a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in the Philippines. Before the last organized American resistance was crushed by overwhelming force, we had become accustomed to seeing our comrades die in battle by the score and by the hundreds. Hardship, bloodshed and death were a commonplace. Yet actual war brought nothing like the horror we were to see and experience in eleven months as military prisoners of a nation which had heretofore demanded and received rank on an equal footing with the leading powers of a civilized world.

There was little choice for the ten of us who finally escaped from the Japanese. We knew that if we were caught in an attempt to escape we would be put to death in a manner not pleasant to think about—we had seen it happen to others of our fellow American prisoners. But although our group contained ten of the strongest and healthiest Americans in the prison camp, we knew

that there was a better than even chance of death as a result of our captors' treatment if we remained in the prison. We had also seen this happen to others of our fellow prisoners. And when we finally did win our way to freedom—ten Americans from Bataan and Corregidor—we were aided and accompanied by two Filipino convicts who in civil life, before the war, had been sentenced for murder, yet were willing to risk death from the Japanese in unselfish loyalty to the United States and their native land.

During the eleven months of our captivity the ten of us were to see thousands of Americans die from the willful neglect of our captors—up to the end of 1943 the Japanese military prisoner-of-war authorities had announced less than a third of the Americans then dead. More have died since, and it is our considered belief that not more than ten per cent of the American military prisoners in the Philippines will survive another year of the conditions which existed at the time of our escape.

During our eleven months of captivity we were to see American officers and enlisted men driven to such tasks as the cleaning of Japanese latrines and sewage systems—each of us was forced to do both.

We were to see American prisoners slapped and beaten without provocation as a commonplace oc-

currence, and most of us were the helpless personal recipients of such treatment.

We were to see Americans so crazed by thirst that they were forced to drink from muddy and polluted carabao wallows, although separated from the clean water of a running stream only by the menace of Japanese bayonets.

We were to see Americans by the hundreds suffering in various declining stages of scurvy, malaria, beri beri and other afflictions, because the Japanese would not give us our medicines, which they had confiscated; neither would the Japanese permit us to use the fruits and vegetables which grew in profusion around our prison stockades.

We were to see Americans slowly going blind from vitamin deficiency; and not one of us escaped without having suffered from one or more of the diseases and deficiencies which at one time were causing the deaths of more than 50 Americans each day.

We were to see unconscious Americans, exhausted on the march, tossed into shallow graves and buried while still alive.

We were to see our fellow American prisoners drop by the score from dysentery and malnutrition, and their bodies litter our prison camps while waiting for the Japanese to get around to giving

us permission to bury our dead. (More than a thousand had died in one prison before the Japanese permitted us to hold religious services over their bodies or to mark their graves.)

We were to see Americans tied up and tortured in full view of our prison camp, beaten and battered until they were no longer recognizable as human, before they were finally removed for execution without trial.

We were to see and experience a daily pattern of existence and treatment which will remain with us as nightmares and revolting memories for the rest of our lives. Among the ten of us, these nightmares and memories resolve themselves into one simple conviction: Japan as a military power must be utterly and finally defeated, *soon*.

As professional military men—one a graduate of Annapolis, the other of West Point—we are fully aware that atrocity stories, as such, can be dangerous in wartime. Yet we feel most emphatically that this story should be told. We feel that all our people should be given a clearer picture of the enemy we face in the Pacific. Most important of all, we feel that the Japanese treatment of American military prisoners, at least in the Philippines, should become a matter of record, *now*, with the hope that this treatment will be improved if the Japanese ever expect to be viewed on a basis of

moral equality with civilized peoples. Finally, we feel that the very highest authorities in Japan should be warned before all the world—and warned now, so that there can be no evasion of responsibility—that we are fully aware of Japanese treatment of captured Americans in the Philippine military prisons.

In addition, this story is being told—and an unpleasant story it is—with the fervent hope that it will increase by even a small particle the American people's feeling of urgency and necessity for a supreme effort in this war, an effort which must not be allowed to diminish until the complete goal has been reached.

Although this report has been prepared as a personal narrative by the senior Army and Navy members of the escape party, we cannot emphasize too strongly that no one person deserves mention above any other. Of the other eight, each lived up to the highest traditions of his individual service. Included in the party were Lieutenant Commander (now Commander) Melvyn H. McCoy, USN, Annapolis '27; Major (now Lieutenant Colonel) Stephen M. Mellnik, Coast Artillery, West Point '32; three Air Corps officers, Captain W. E. Dyess and Second Lieutenants (now Captains) L. A. Boelens and Samuel Grashio; three Marine Corps officers, Captain A. C. Shofner and

First Lieutenants Jack Hawkins and Michael Dobervich (all now Majors); and two Army sergeants, R. B. Spielman and Paul Marshall. Captain Dyess had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, on his return to the United States, when he was killed in a plane crash at Burbank, California, on December 22, 1943.

When Corregidor finally fell at 12 noon on May 6, 1942, the formal surrender came as a surprise to almost none of the seven thousand Americans and five thousand Filipinos on The Rock, particularly those of us who had served as staff officers. The surrender was a logical climax to a series of disasters which had been high-lighted by the evacuation of Manila and the Cavite Naval Base on Christmas Eve, the heavy aerial bombing of Corregidor on December 29, 1941, the departure of high United States and Philippine officials in February, and the withdrawal to Australia of General MacArthur and members of his staff in March.

Then on April 9, 1942, came the surrender of Bataan. There were approximately four times as many men on Bataan, only four miles away, as we had on Corregidor. We knew that The Rock was next. The Japs were hitting us with everything they had. It was only a matter of time.

As the time for the surrender drew near, one

of us (McCoy) was in the tunnel occupied by the Navy and the other (Mellnik) was stationed in the Headquarters Tunnel occupied by the Army. We were not quartered together in the same prison until some weeks after our capture. Thus, each of us saw different phases of the same event; and in telling the story of what happened while we were official military prisoners of the Japanese in the Philippines, each has elected to tell the part with which he is most familiar.

COMMANDER MCCOY: Even in the depths of the solid rock tunnels of Corregidor we could feel the vibrations of the almost constant Japanese barrage. One night toward the end of April the barrage lifted for a short time. Hundreds of people went out into the open for a breath of air and a smoke. It was pitch dark. The only light came from the few stars, and the occasional faint glow of a carefully shielded cigarette. Suddenly the group of people around the tunnel entrance seemed to be struck by lightning. There was an awful glare and a mighty crash. A salvo of Japanese 240mm shells had landed in the midst of this group. Just that one salvo—no more.

Fortunately it was dark and the survivors did not have to look on the scene around them. But it was four hours later before the hospital staff com-



pleted their amputations, transfusions, brain operations and other work.

About midnight that night I went off duty in the radio shack in the Navy Tunnel, and I went out to the tunnel entrance where the tragedy occurred. There I found one of the nurses who had helped the doctors during the evening. She was crying her heart out on a sandbagged machine gun. I did not know whether she had suffered a personal loss, or whether our situation in general had become too much for her. She obviously had come out into the darkness to hide her emotions from the wounded, so I tiptoed away and did not disturb her.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: About the last week in April it became evident from the volume and distribution of enemy fire that a landing would be attempted on Corregidor. Our heavy artillery was being knocked out more rapidly than we could repair it.

The headquarters of General Wainwright and General Moore were in Malinta Tunnel. In this tunnel were the hospital, machine shops, food and ammunition reserves, radio station, and administration units.

I was directed to form and take charge of the Malinta Tunnel guard. The purpose of this guard

was to prevent a Jap raiding unit from getting in and capturing the headquarters units, thus bringing about the surrender of Corregidor. The tunnel runs east and west, with additional hospital tunnels running north and south. The guard was composed of administrative personnel.

On the night of May 5th, about 8:00 P.M., the guard was alerted—an enemy landing appeared very likely.

Enemy 240mm shells were falling all over the place. The tunnel system literally rocked from the impact of 240mm salvos—salvos exploding so fast they sounded like a giant machine gun. Hospital beds jumped all around, medicine cases had to be lashed down. In the previous week we had opened up six additional laterals in the tunnel to take care of the wounded. The tunnel system was now mostly hospital. As fast as we used up supplies of food or ammunition, this storage space was turned into a hospital area. Even so, we had to build triple-decker beds to accommodate all the wounded.

The nurses behaved like champions. The wounded realized fully the hopelessness of the situation and made little complaint. About 4:00 A.M. on May 6th I made a routine visit to the hospital tunnel. Everything was normal. Breakfast was being served. One blond nurse winked at me

and sang out, "If you fellows can't chase those Nips away, we nurses will have to get out there and do it ourselves."

I stopped at the desk of another nurse. She was recording the amount of morphine used up in the past twenty-four hours. "I know this recording is silly," she said. "It won't matter in a few days whether the records are here or not. But I've got to believe that it does matter—I've got to."

The entrances to the tunnel were lit up by the glow of motor vehicles which had been hit by shells and were burning. I checked on a machine gun position outside the tunnel. There I found Sergeants Spielman and Marshall (who knew as little as I of the experiences we were to go through in the months to come). Their machine gun pit had been blasted out several times during the night. They were digging themselves out of a pile of rubble which had covered their gun in the explosion of a heavy salvo. Sergeant Spielman grinned ruefully and said, "Nothing like this ever happened to me in Carrizo Springs, Texas." If Carrizo Springs turns out many like Spielman, Carrizo Springs is all right.

About dawn of the morning of May 6th, we received a report of three Jap tanks having landed in the fighting area. Our anti-tank guns were of World War I vintage. The road leading through

the headquarters tunnel had anti-tank barricades at various intervals. These consisted of concrete pillars to which were attached iron railroad rails. During the night these rails had been removed to permit an ammunition carrier to get through, and at one place the barricade was exposed to enemy fire. When I called for volunteers to replace the tank barrier, Sergeant Scott O'Neil stepped forward with a detail of ten men. They replaced the rails without a casualty. Sergeant O'Neil was awarded the Silver Star. No enemy tank got near the headquarters tunnel until after the surrender.

By 9:00 A.M., on the day of the surrender, Jap snipers had infiltrated our beach defense lines in some force. Machine gun bullets whizzed around the tunnel entrances, adding a new note to the scream of falling shells and the blast of exploding bombs. I had often wondered what the reactions of men would be under these conditions. I had expected fear, anxiety, emotionalism in all its forms. I found nothing but matter-of-fact business. An enemy machine gunner was discovered on a ridge, and a squad of men calmly discussed the manner of his liquidation. A puff of dust in front of the machine gun would result in that rifleman being joshed for the poor use of his rifle. When the machine gun was finally knocked out the

riflemen paused for a cigarette. After the scream of bombs and shells, ordinary bullets flying around them caused little comment. As one rifleman put it, "All them Japs wear glasses—they can't see well enough to hit us."

At 10:00 A.M., orders were sent to all artillery units to destroy their guns and installations by 12 noon. There were few guns left to destroy. Most of the guns had been destroyed by the enemy. However, stocks of ammunition, power plants, and other installations and supplies had to be made useless to the enemy.

At noon on May 6, 1942, a gloomy pall fell over The Rock. Then the months of constant strain began to do their work. Some men cried quietly, others became hysterical. Exactly on the stroke of twelve a hospital corpsman came into General Moore's office, General Wainwright having left the tunnel to arrange the surrender. The corpsman was sobbing, tears were streaming down his face. He sat down and sobbed out what we all knew: "There's a white flag waving at the hospital tunnel entrance."

To most, the surrender came as a relief. But the silence following the surrender was worse than the shelling. It was uncanny, awful. The sudden opening of a door, a falling chair, would make us jump and flinch. In the moment of surrender none

of us thought of tomorrow, for there was no tomorrow. For us, the end had come.

COMMANDER MCCOY: At 11:55 on the morning of May 6, 1942, I wrote out the Navy's last message from The Rock and handed it to a radioman 1/c at the sending apparatus. "Beam it for Radio Honolulu," I said. "Don't bother with code." Then the message began to go out. "GOING OFF AIR NOW. GOODBY AND GOOD LUCK. CALLAHAN AND MCCOY."

It was three hours before the Imperial Japanese Marines finally swarmed into the Navy Tunnel on Corregidor. During that wait, I had time to think of the two chances I had had to escape from Corregidor during the siege, both of which I had turned down.

The first of these escape opportunities came on the day after Christmas, 1941. Outside the Bay was the sailing ship *Lanakai*, a two-master which had once been used by Hollywood and Miss Dorothy Lamour in the motion picture, "Typhoon." There was a place for me aboard, and I could have received permission to go; but I was radio matériel officer for the Navy in that area, and I knew that my services would be needed in our communications with the outer world. I outfitted the *Lanakai* with certain equipment and provided enlisted personnel to operate it. The *Lanakai* got through.

Another escape opportunity presented itself in the month before Corregidor fell. A small group of us came into possession of the sloop, *Southern Seas*, completely outfitted with charts, food, fuel for the auxiliary engine, and new sails and rigging. The *Southern Seas* was anchored off The Rock, and a few of us intended to board her and make for the open sea at the last moment before capture.

In the last days before surrender, however, all of us were too busy to think of escape. The Japs began to hit The Rock with a minimum of 5,000 shells a day, mostly of about 150 millimeter, along with some 240's and 105's. On one day they blasted us with 16,000 shells, mostly fired from gun emplacements on Bataan. Much of this fire could not be returned. The Japs massed much of their artillery in the No. 2 hospital area on Bataan, an area which we knew to contain at least 6,000 American and Filipino wounded. The Japs literally used our wounded to make ramparts around their guns.

And when I got ready to use the *Southern Seas* it was too late. Two days before the surrender the sloop was stolen from her moorings by some of our own people on The Rock. Whoever took her obviously did not know our recognition signals. As she passed one of our outer bastions she did not

answer a challenge. She was riddled with gunfire and sunk. Presumably all aboard were killed.

There were approximately a hundred and twenty-five Naval officers and men in the Navy Tunnel when the first Japs came in, some three hours after the surrender. The Japs were ready with bayonets and grenades. (They entered the Army Tunnel with tanks and flame-throwers.) When they saw no sign of opposition they lowered their rifles and became almost jovial as they got down to the pleasant business of looting. This practice is officially forbidden, so Japanese officers made a point of not entering the tunnel for almost two hours after the enlisted men first appeared. By that time everything of value had been taken.

The Japs seemed to prize above all else our wrist watches. I saw one burly Jap marine with watches all the way up to one elbow, halfway up to the other, and with a bayonet aimed at the stomach of another Jap who was trying to beat him to an additional prize. Besides watches, fountain pens also were highly prized by our captors. There were numerous scuffles between the Japs over possession of these articles.

Some of the Japs in the Navy Tunnel could speak a little English. They told us they had been used as assault troops at Hong Kong and Singapore. We were only slightly comforted at being



told that we had put up the stiffest resistance they had met.

The first officers to enter the tunnel were non-coms, sergeants. As the first one entered, a Jap soldier was hopefully searching me—everything of value in my possession had long since been taken away from me. The Japanese sergeant slapped and cuffed this soldier brutally, the soldier standing rigidly at attention, and the sergeant blandly ignoring the evidence of previous looting that was in plain view.

But Japanese battle action did not end with our surrender. On the day after our capitulation, Japanese planes flew at minimum level over The Rock and dropped bombs, first making sure that their own men were out of the way. Casualties on our side were slight, and the Japs evidently were only bolstering a threat made to General Wainwright that, unless all the forces in the Visayan Islands surrendered, all on Corregidor would be massacred.

And it did not take us long to learn the temper of our captors. A gun crew on nearby Fort Drum, called "the concrete battleship," had fired into a Japanese assault party a few days before Corregidor fell. A high-ranking Japanese officer was killed. This officer's brother, on the Jap headquarters staff back in Manila, ordered that the men on Drum be given special attention. They were beaten and

hazed unmercifully for forty-eight hours. Another incident occurred when a Japanese sentry began to beat an Army enlisted man without provocation—we did not know at the time that such actions were commonplace. The soldier made as if to hit the sentry with his fists. He was shot dead by another sentry before he could complete the motion.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: Two days after the surrender the 7,000 Americans and 5,000 Filipinos were awakened at night and ordered out of the tunnels on The Rock. We did not know where we were going, but were prodded along in the darkness at the point of Jap bayonets.

We soon saw that we were being concentrated in the Kindley Field Garage area. This had formerly been a balloon station, but the roof had been torn off by Jap shells, and the walls knocked down. It was now only a square of concrete, about 100 yards to the side, and with one side extending into the water of the Bay.

The twelve thousand of us were crowded into this area. All the wounded who could walk also were ordered to join us, many with broken bones or serious injuries.

For seven days we were kept on this concrete square without food, except for that which could

be scavenged by the few of us who were formed into work parties, to clear away the dead and to remove the rubble caused by Jap artillery. Most of the prisoners got nothing to eat during those seven days.

There was only one water spigot for the twelve thousand. A twelve-hour wait to fill one canteen was the usual rule.

There were no latrines in the area, except some shallow holes which the Japs allowed us to dig on the outskirts of the concrete.

The heat was at its worst. Men fainted by the score, and were passed from hand to hand down to the waters of the Bay. Each morning a hundred or more unconscious were taken out of the area back into the tunnel. I do not know what happened to them. We were covered by clouds of black flies, and dysentery had already begun to spread among us. Our dead, their bodies bloating, lay on The Rock for several days. The Japs doused their own dead with oil and burned them in huge pyres, mostly on Bataan. (Before a Japanese was burned, a hand or arm was cut off and burned separately, and these ashes were returned to Japan.)

After seven days we were given our first food—one mess kit of rice and a tin of sardines.

On the afternoon of May 22nd the Japs loaded

us onto three merchant ships of about 7,000 tons each. There were approximately 4,000 of us on each ship, designed to accommodate 12 passengers. We remained aboard all night, in the most suffocating condition imaginable.

We got under way the next morning and we were surprised to observe that we were not being taken directly to Manila, as was the case with the one ship loaded only with captive Filipinos. We were to learn later that there was a reason for this.

Instead, our ship dropped anchor off Paranaque, a suburb south of Manila. Here we waited until the heat of the day had almost reached its peak. Then we were jammed into barges. After an hour in the sun we were taken to within a hundred yards of the beach. This was surprising to us, for the barges could easily have run right up to the beach. We were ordered to jump overboard in water up to our armpits and march to the beach, where we formed four abreast. Then we knew we were to be marched through Manila presenting the worst appearance possible—wet, bedraggled, hungry, thirsty, and many so weak from illness they could hardly stand.

This was our captors' subtle method of convincing the subject peoples of the Philippines that only the Japanese were members of the Master Race.

COMMANDER MCCOY: I had fared better than most of the prisoners, for I had been kept in Malinta Tunnel with Generals Moore and Drake and with the senior Naval officer, Captain K. M. Hoeffel, USN. Thus I was able to offer furtive help to some of the marchers in the line of prisoners. The Japanese had intended this to be a triumphal victory parade, but there were few signs of happiness on the faces of the Filipinos who lined our route. Instead, there were many tears and many carefully shielded signs of encouragement. Armed Japanese guards marched at our side at intervals, and the route for its entire five miles was patrolled by Japanese cavalry.

As we marched down Dewey Boulevard there were many landmarks that had become familiar to me in my two-year tour of Navy duty in Manila. As we passed the High Commissioner's residence we noticed Japanese flags flying—this was now the headquarters of General Homa. We passed the Elks Club, with the Army-Navy Club visible at a distance. At the Legislative Building we turned right, passed over Quezon Bridge and onto Ascaraga Street.

All during the march the heat was terrific—it has been my observation that the Japanese deliberately wait for the hottest part of the day before moving American prisoners. The weaker

ones in our ranks began to stumble during the first mile. No doubt they had been weakened further by the cramped night on the ships, and the lack of food. These were cuffed back into the line and made to march until they dropped. If no guards were in the immediate vicinity, the Filipinos along the route tried to revive the prisoners with ices, water and fruit. These Filipinos were severely beaten if caught by the guards. As prisoners fainted, they were picked up by trucks which were following the march for that purpose.

When we were within two blocks of our destination, Old Bilibid Prison, I noticed that a lieutenant colonel was walking in an unusual, stumbling manner. I was not near enough to help him. Suddenly he fell forward, disrupting the line of march. Japanese guards happened to be nearby. They ordered two Army enlisted men to pick the Colonel up, holding him under each armpit.

The march was ordered to resume, and the unconscious man was dragged in this manner the remaining two blocks to Old Bilibid, where the Army enlisted men were ordered to throw him on the prison floor. I started to kneel down at his side but a Japanese bayonet was shoved at my chest in a very businesslike manner.

The Colonel had not moved, and had been given no medical attention when, two hours later,

I was ordered with Captain Hoeffel and several Army staff officers to the elementary school at Pasay, a suburb of Manila. In this school was the Navy Hospital Unit from Canacao, Cavite. The Unit's medicines had been confiscated, except for those which a few doctors had managed to hide among their personal effects.

An hour after we reached Pasay, the Colonel was brought in and placed on a mattress on the floor. Naval doctors worked on him for nearly an hour, while the rest of us stood about and wondered what was to happen to us next, and what was to be our fate. In all the entire group, only the Colonel had no worries for the future. He was dead.

Death was no stranger to any of us who had gone through the Battle of the Philippines, but we were to learn about a new kind of death. For instance, while I was at Pasay a group of 300 American prisoners who had been captured on Bataan and had been at Camp O'Donnell passed through on their way to a work detail in Batangus. All were in a deplorable condition—the story of the “death march” to O'Donnell, after the surrender of Bataan, probably will come to rank with the worst chapters in the story of human cruelty. And the next morning after their arrival, eighteen of these men were unable to walk, and they were

replaced by eighteen healthier prisoners already at Pasay.

Later on we were to meet up with this party again—at least, out of the original party of 300, we were to meet up with the thirty-odd who had not died from hunger, cruelty or disease. Later on, although we did not know it at the time, we were to be transferred to the prison camp at Cabanatuan, where death was a part of our way of life.



## 2

### *The Death March from Bataan*

IT DID NOT take us long to learn that the hardships we had faced in battle were, if anything, much less severe than those awaiting us as military prisoners of the conquering Nipponese.

With the surrender of Corregidor on May 6, 1942, one month after the fall of our larger force on Bataan, organized American resistance to the Japanese in the Philippines had come to an end. At first, hope ran high among the thousands of American and Filipino fighting men who had been forced to lay down their arms in defeat. There was a feeling, particularly among the enlisted men, that Uncle Sam had merely been caught off balance by a puny but cunning foe in the first round, and that the knockout punch even now was on the way. In Old Bilibid Prison, in Manila, this feeling was expressed in such statements as, "We won't be here long—a couple of weeks, maybe, or a month."

But those of us who had served as staff officers, and who knew something of the problems involved, were not so optimistic. We all wanted to believe the best, but we knew that the United States had suffered her worst defeat in history, and we knew that the job ahead would be long and hard.

And from our few furtive contacts with civilian Filipinos outside our prison walls, we learned that the Japs were losing no time in bringing the New Order in East Asia to the Philippines. It is surprising how much news does seep into a prison, no matter how heavily guarded. We had the additional advantage of two listening points, one of us (McCoy) being in prison with the Army and Navy staff officers at Pasay, and the other (Mellnik) in Old Bilibid.

All Filipinos, we learned, were now forced to bow to the Japanese invaders on the streets of Manila. All streets with American names, incidentally, were being given Japanese names. All commercial enterprises were being given Japanese direction, and cultured Filipinos were being subtly told that their place in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was in the rice paddies and abaca fields. Education was being suspended, and the Japanese were announcing in forcible terms that they were benevolently decreeing a return to the original Filipino "culture."

This meant that, for Filipinos, there were to be no more such "foreign corruptions" as modern plumbing, cooking on electric stoves, going to movies, riding in automobiles, wearing silk stockings or using cosmetics. In addition, the English language (spoken by almost every Filipino under 35) was to be forbidden, and was to be replaced by *Nippon-Go*, a sort of simplified "basic Japanese."

And the Japanese conquerors had already begun a systematic looting of the Philippine Commonwealth. Cities were being stripped of all articles needed by Japan. Electric fans, refrigerators, machinery, household appliances, automobiles, scrap iron—all were being taken to Japan. Even rice, never too plentiful in the Philippines, was being sent to Japan. Of course the Japs were paying for these things, or some of them, and paying high prices, too—the printing presses were turning out worthless Japanese Occupation Currency at top speed.

But few of the prisoners captured on Corregidor were to remain long in Manila. We were shortly to learn that, although many civilian internees were to be quartered in the Manila area, the Japs had other plans for those of us who were American prisoners of war.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: McCoy was still at Pasay when I learned, on May 27, 1942, that I was about to be transferred to the prisoner-of-war camp at Cabanatuan, about seventy-five miles north of Manila in the Province of Luzon.

As was their custom when American military prisoners were to be moved, the Japanese waited until the heat had reached its peak before loading some fifteen hundred of us into iron boxcars. There were a hundred men to each car, with no room to sit or lie down. The cars were tightly closed so that there was no ventilation. With the sun beating down on the metal roof, the inside of the car was like an oven, with no water or sanitary facilities available. Although several men fainted, there were no deaths on the trip.

When we got off the train at Cabanatuan we were put into an open field surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by sentries. We were told that we would remain overnight.

Curious and sympathetic Filipino civilians watched us from a respectful distance, some of them bearing bananas, papayas and mangoes, but the Jap sentries kept them warned back with their bayonets.

Lieutenant Colonel Carl Englehart and I were trying to keep cool under a pup tent which we had

put up. The sight of the fruit was tantalizing beyond description. Carl had served as a language student in Japan and, finding a few pesos between us, he spoke in Japanese to a nearby guard, asking him to buy us some fruit.

The Jap seemed delighted at hearing an American speak his language. Much to our surprise he got us the fruit, and then hastened away. We had been on a steady diet of boiled rice and watery soup since our capture (when we got anything to eat at all) and we were wolfing down the fruit when the Jap guard returned, smiling and bowing. He spoke to Carl in Japanese.

"Something's up," Carl said to me. "The Jap C.O. wants to see us."

The Jap guard escorted us to the nearby house of the Japanese commanding officer at Cabanatuan. This personage greeted us in perfect English, but we could see that he was in a murderous mood.

After the greeting, the Jap commander fixed us with what seemed an interminable scowl. Then he spat at us suddenly: "What do you Americans mean by bombing and machine-gunning Japanese cities?"

I am sure that Carl was as dumbfounded as I. But I also felt a wild hope that the American invasion of Japan was under way. We hastily assured

the Japanese commander that we knew nothing about any attack on Japan.

He launched into a long tirade against the United States and particularly against President Roosevelt, during which we learned that he was referring to the American air raid on Japanese cities (later we learned that this was the Doolittle raid, with planes which took off from a carrier in the Pacific). At every pause in his tirade, we would get in a few words protesting our innocence.

The Japanese officer finally indicated that he had finished his tongue-lashing. As we turned to go he said, "There are fifteen hundred of you out in that stockade. If I thought a one of you sympathized with the bombing of Japanese cities, I would turn machine guns on you." There was not the slightest doubt in our minds of his sincerity.

The next day, when the sun had reached its zenith, we began our march of twelve miles to our prison camp. Not one of us was fit for marching. For five months we had been under siege on Corregidor, under constant strain. During more than three weeks of captivity the Japanese had not provided us with a single decent meal. Many of us were ill.

As we passed small Philippine barrios, or villages, on the march, the inhabitants seemed anxious to help us. Small children darted to our side and gave us balls of boiled rice. Those that were

caught by the guards, however, were cuffed unmercifully.

After we had gone about eight miles, I began to suffer intolerably. The heat was unbearable. My heart was pounding and my pack grew heavier by the minute. I began to count the steps, and long for the sight of a new kilometer post beside the road.

Occasionally I would pass a man who had fallen out, gasping for air, or white and still in unconsciousness. As the Jap guards came along they would encourage these men to keep moving, using the point of their bayonets. Some men managed to get up and stagger further. Others had reached the stage when an inch of bayonet point brought no response. These men were later picked up by trucks—those who were still alive.

After a brief stay at a temporary camp, we reached the Cabanatuan Prison on May 29, 1942. This camp had been built originally as training quarters for Filipino detachments of the United States Forces Far East, and no preparation had been made for our coming. But the lack of food did not bother most of us. We were glad to drag our weary bodies into the barracks and throw ourselves down on the bare floors.

The next morning the camp was electrified by a report which quickly swept through our ranks.

During the night three young Naval Reserve ensigns had simply walked off into the darkness of the jungle and had successfully escaped. We were to hear more from these men later; and the Japanese lost no time in discovering that these prisoners were missing.

Barbed wire was hastily thrown about the camp, and sentry towers were built at short intervals. Then the grim Japs went through the camp and formed us off into groups of ten. If any one member of any group escaped, we were told, the other nine would be shot. These squads quickly became known among ourselves as "shooting squads," and each prisoner counted himself a member of his own "shooting squad."

We had barely settled into the prison at Cabanatuan when, on June 2nd, the first detachments of prisoners from Bataan began to arrive at our camp. We were appalled at their condition, and even more appalled when we learned what had happened to them on what they all called "the death march from Bataan."

These prisoners arrived at Cabanatuan in trucks for the simple reason that only a very few among them were physically able to stand up and walk a hundred yards.

In the first truck to arrive was a young enlisted man who at one time had served as my orderly.



He staggered to my side and, holding himself up by feebly grasping at my shoulders, he sobbed out, "Sir, is it different here—will they treat us like humans?" I tried to comfort the boy by telling him that everything would be all right, and he staggered away, still sobbing.

The Bataan prisoners who were joining us now, and who had been prisoners a month longer than we had, were the most woebegone objects I have ever seen. They were wild-eyed, gaunt, their clothes in tatters. Many had no equipment of any kind, and some clutched at rusty tin cans which they used as mess kits. These men had their own doctors with them—the medical detachments from Bataan—but the doctors had no medicines, and they were as sick as the men.

One of these prisoners was a quartermaster lieutenant who was in the last stages of what was called "wet beri beri." He was horribly swollen from his hips down, was in frightful pain, and constantly expressed the fear that if the swelling rose above his hips to his heart he would die. We finally got a Japanese doctor to examine him. The doctor said that if the lieutenant's condition had not improved "in a day or two" he would return with some medicine. The next day, however, the man was dead. In death he was not alone, for soon the first chore of our day was the removal from our

barracks of the bodies of men who had died during the night.

COMMANDER MCCOY: Mellnik had been at Cabanatuan about five weeks when I learned that I also was to be transferred there. After being captured on Corregidor, I had spent my first few days at Pasay, where the Japs had turned an elementary school into a prison for the senior Army and Navy staff officers. When these officers were removed from Pasay—presumably to be taken to prisons in Japan or Formosa—I was transferred to Old Bilibid in Manila.

At Old Bilibid I was assigned to such jobs as cleaning out Japanese latrines and sewage systems. On another occasion I took a detail of enlisted men, under heavy guard, to Rizal Stadium, where the Japs had concentrated mountains of captured American quartermaster supplies. Much of these supplies consisted of food, and the Japs told us as we loaded it on trucks that it was to be sent to the American prisoners of war. During my eleven months of captivity I was never to see any of this food. In fact, and except for boiled rice, I was never to see much food of any kind.

After a tortuous trip from Manila, I arrived at the prison camp at Cabanatuan on July 7th, less than two months after the camp was formed.

My first impression of Cabanatuan was one of utter desolation and hopelessness. As I was mustered into the camp I was first searched by Japanese guards. The only things of value they found on me were two small bottles containing quinine and sulfa drugs, which had been given me by a doctor friend at Old Bilibid. The Japs confiscated this medicine.

One of the first persons I saw was an Army officer whom I had met at Army-Navy parties in Manila, and whom I had talked to on several pleasant pre-Pearl Harbor occasions in the Transportation Club in the Marsman Building.

"You look awful," I said to him, staring at his gaunt, stricken appearance.

"I was on Bataan," he said. "I made the death march."

I had already become aware of an awful stench about the camp, but for the first time I noticed that, outside of each barracks, there was a neat row of bodies. Somehow I knew that the bodies had been there for some time—clouds of flies arose from them when groups of prisoners walked nearby.

"Good God!"

I was pointing.

The Army officer looked casually at the row of bodies and said, "You'll get used to that." He was

about to say more when he suddenly clutched at his stomach with both hands and began to run in a broken gait, managing to fling over his shoulder a muffled "See you later."

I soon learned that this hurried "see you later" was a common parting salute at Cabanatuan, as prisoners suffering from dysentery and other disorders struck out in the direction of the latrines. The worst sufferers were the prisoners from Bataan.

I heard the story of the death march from Bataan to Camp O'Donnell from many responsible officers at Cabanatuan, but I heard it most often from the officer I had recognized on my arrival at the camp. This officer's name has been supplied to military authorities but it will not be used here for reasons which will become obvious.

After the fall of Bataan on April 8, 1942, approximately 10,000 American and 45,000 Filipino prisoners were marched to San Fernando, Pampanga, a distance of about 120 miles. These prisoners were marched in different groups, and some were treated worse than others. In most cases they went for days without water—one officer told me that he went so long without water that, presumably due to dehydration, he observed crystals in his urine. My Army friend—I shall call him Gunn—said he went for many days without food;

he did not remember the exact number, as he had lost count, but it was "more than a week." Then he was allowed one mess kit of rice.

"We often passed running streams," said Gunn, "but the Japs seldom allowed us to drink. A few prisoners tried it, mostly Filipinos. They were shot down and left dying where they fell. If we drank from muddy carabao wallows, though, the Japs didn't seem to mind. That's where so many hundreds of us got dysentery, I suppose."

During the long march these groups of Bataan prisoners passed through the village of Lubao, and were kept there overnight. They were quartered in a warehouse of galvanized tin, with no windows but with a few small grid openings near the floor. First the Japanese would herd as many prisoners into the building as seemed possible, requiring them all to stand. Then, when the building was completely full, more prisoners were placed just outside the door and a steel cable was attached to one corner of the building. Several guards then took the other end of this cable and by pulling it taut, they squeezed all those outside into the building. The sliding door was then closed and secured for the night.

During the night no prisoner was allowed outside this building for any reason whatsoever. Many of the prisoners were ill, or were walking wounded.

Since there were no sanitation facilities inside, and since several persons died each night, it is easy to understand why those who made the death march always shuddered when they described their overnight stop in the village of Lubao.

While on the march, regular clean-up squads of Japanese followed at the rear to dispose of the prisoners who fell out, both Filipinos and Americans. Filipinos were bayoneted or shot, and left where they fell, but Americans were usually taken some distance from the road. At the end of the day the Japanese usually dispatched those prisoners who seemed so weakened that they would not be able to make the march on the following day. Different methods were used to dispose of these weakened prisoners. There were many cases of burial alive, often with the forced assistance of prisoners. Some of the prisoners were forced to dig their own graves. The victims of this treatment were most often Filipinos, but there were some cases of Americans being buried alive.

"On the march," Gunn said, "the Japs treated the Filipinos even worse than they did us. The Japs claimed that in aiding the Americans the Filipinos had turned against their own blood, that the Filipinos were Orientals who had betrayed the Orient. When a Filipino fell out on the march he was shot

or bayoneted where he lay. Then he was dragged to the side of the road and left. In the case of an American, the Japs at least took him out of sight of the other prisoners before they put him out of the way.

"The first time it happened," said Gunn, "I didn't know what was up. An enlisted man had keeled over—he had been stumbling for hours—and the Japs dragged him to a ditch about a hundred yards from the road. A prisoner was taken out of the line and escorted to where the Japs had placed this unconscious man in the ditch. One of the Japs handed him a shovel. Another jabbed a bayonet into his side and gave an order in Japanese. He did not understand. A Jap grabbed the shovel out of his hands and demonstrated by throwing a few shovelfuls of earth on the unconscious soldier. Then he handed him the shovel. God! . . . It doesn't help to think that the soldier, and others later, were already more dead than alive. . . . The worst time was once when a burial victim with about six inches of earth over him suddenly regained consciousness and clawed his way out until he was almost sitting upright. Then I learned to what lengths a man will go, McCoy, to hang onto his own life. The bayonets began to prod him in the side, and he was forced to bash the

soldier over the head with the shovel and then finish burying him."

Gunn told this story to me several times.

Often, after talking about the death march from Bataan to O'Donnell, Gunn would pause for a while and then say, "Those things don't happen to Americans, McCoy. I know we've heard of Hitler starving and killing people by the thousands; and we've heard of the Japs using living Chinese for bayonet practice. But we're Americans, McCoy! Nobody ever taught us about things like that."

When the Bataan prisoners finally reached San Fernando, on the way to O'Donnell, they were jammed one hundred into a boxcar and, always in the heat of the day, given a two-hour ride to Capiz, Luzon. Then they marched the remainder of the way to the camp.

Conditions at Camp O'Donnell were, if possible, as bad as those along the route of march. The camp commander announced that he had not been notified that such a large number of prisoners was being sent. He had no facilities for them. This the prisoners soon saw, for there was only one water spigot for the many thousands, and all the running water in the vicinity rapidly became polluted by the sick and the dead. And, in a regular public speech to the assembled prisoners, the Japanese



camp commander stated that he did not like Americans, and that he did not care how many died.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: When the Bataan prisoners arrived at Cabanatuan from O'Donnell, or what was left of them, the American leaders in our group did their best to compile a list of those who had died previously. This list was kept up to date as others died at Cabanatuan. As far as I know, the list is still at Cabanatuan, and it contains many hundreds of names which have not yet been announced by the Japanese.

The death rate at O'Donnell, we learned, had been frightful. Many of the prisoners had fought on to the end at Bataan although wounded or ill. After the death march there was hardly a man who was not clearly a hospital case by the time he reached O'Donnell. Careful estimates from many of the officers who survived place the number of Americans who died there in April and May at 2200. I have been assured that this number is conservative, despite the confusion which necessarily existed in the midst of such wholesale sickness and death. This confusion was heightened by the fact that Filipinos were dying at the rate of five hundred a day, with Americans dying at the rate of fifty a day. The problem of burial of these bodies became extremely acute (just as it also became

at Cabanatuan). The Japs would not help with this work. The Filipinos and Americans were so weak that there were not enough healthy men to dig the graves. As a result, the camp became so littered with bodies that it was sometimes hard to tell the living from the dead.

This death rate at O'Donnell finally became so alarming that the Japanese began to discharge the Filipinos as soon as they became ill, hoping that they would die in the bosom of their families and thus free the Japs of responsibility. American officers say that, of the 45,000 Filipinos who started out from Bataan on April 9, 1942, fully 27,000 had died by the end of May, when the surviving Americans were transferred to Cabanatuan.

COMMANDER MCCOY: "You won't like it here," Gunn said to me, shortly after I arrived at Cabanatuan. "Had dysentery yet?"

"No."

"Malaria?"

"No. I thought I had a chill last night. Maybe it was the food."

"What food?" said Gunn sourly.

More will be told about the food at Cabanatuan later. But at this time there were already many cases of vitamin deficiency. Our doctors had no medicines to speak of, so they advised us to crush

charcoal and mix it with our rice as a slight medicinal aid.

"I suppose the charcoal pudding didn't agree with me," I said.

"A chill, eh?" said Gunn. He shook his head. "You're being initiated into the brotherhood, all right."

When ten of us escaped in April of 1943, reaching the United States separately some months later, Gunn and many others were on the definite downgrade in health—those who were still alive. I doubt very much if Gunn is still among the living. But I know that if he is dead—he and many others like him—he died without cracking up, and while still fighting to stay alive. A few of the prisoners may not have been entirely sane when last we saw them, but there had not been one case of outright mental crack-up. I still don't know why a lot of us didn't become raving mad.

"You won't like it here," said Gunn.

I followed his eyes. A platoon of Japanese troops and an officer were swinging down the road toward the camp, singing a marching song. Rumor in the camp had it that this group had gone forth earlier in the day in search of a party of Philippine patriots. We soon saw that the rumor was correct. The platoon marched in military order up to our stockade and halted on an order from the officer. Then

they impaled a gory Filipino head on a tall fence post near our gate.

This obviously was a subtle warning against any infraction of our prison rules. We were soon to learn that it was not an empty threat.

# 3

## *Death at Cabanatuan*

THE American prisoner-of-war camp at Cabanatuan, 75 miles north of Manila in the Province of Luzon, was roughly a long rectangle of about 500 by 700 yards, bounded on one of the shorter sides by the road from Cabanatuan City and on the other three sides by once cultivated fields. These fields had not been tended since the Japanese attack on the Philippines, and they were now overgrown due to neglect. The prison stockade was split crosswise into three groups of about 230 yards wide each. Both of us were in group 1, the section nearest the road. Each group contained barracks for approximately 2000 American prisoners, mostly officers, although there were some enlisted men. Cabanatuan Camp No. 2, six miles farther into the jungle, was laid out along similar lines, with its prisoners made up of both officers and enlisted men, all Americans.

At the north end of our rectangle was a moat

which occasionally filled with water during heavy rains, and which we used for drainage for our latrines and urinals. Nearly always in this section were to be found a number of prisoners dead or dying of dysentery and starvation, men who had made it this far and could go no farther.

At the opposite end from the moat was the enclosure used by the Japanese soldiery for their barracks, mess halls, drill field and parade ground, with a road running between the Japanese area and the prison stockade. Beyond this was the hospital for prisoners, staffed by American doctors but almost wholly without medicines or equipment. There were usually about 2500 patients in this hospital, but they fared little better than those who were ill in the prison proper.

Each of these three divisions of Cabanatuan Camp No. 1 was a separate entity, partitioned from the other. A high barbed wire fence enclosed the entire area in which the prisoners were contained. At regular intervals around the prison stockade were elevated sentry platforms, always manned by Japanese guards with rifles or sub-machine guns of the light-calibre variety used by the Japs. Foot-soldiers also patrolled the stockade at all times.

Discipline in the camp was severe.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: Escape was in the minds of nearly all the prisoners at Cabanatuan, particularly since we had before us the example of the three young Naval Reserve ensigns who had walked off into the jungle on our first night at the camp. The success of this effort, however, had made it more difficult for the rest of us. For, as a result, the Japs had formed us into the "shooting squads" of ten men each, with the threat to kill the other nine if any one man got away. It later developed, incidentally, that the three Naval Reserve officers were not as successful as we had thought.

One enlisted man from the 200th Coast Artillery escaped from the hospital in late July or early August. This man, a Mexican, went to Cabanatuan and, passing as a Filipino, worked for the Japs. Our grapevine soon informed him that the other nine men of his squad had been marked for execution, so he voluntarily returned and gave himself up.

This man was first beaten by the guards, then shackled loosely so he could walk. Then he was put on permanent latrine duty, and was always followed by a guard who held a rope which was tied around the prisoner. He was beaten often, and at night he was locked up.

There was another flurry in early August when

the Japs reported that two prisoners had escaped from the hospital. The "shooting squads" of these men were immediately isolated for execution, and the execution date was set, when the bodies of the men who had supposedly escaped were fortunately discovered. One had fallen into a latrine, and the body of another was found behind a barracks. Both apparently had been delirious when they died.

On another occasion five enlisted men were arrested by the Japs on the charge that they had been dealing through the fence with friendly Filipinos. Two of these Filipinos were also caught, and all seven of the men freely admitted their guilt, pointing out that their only crime was an attempt to get more food.

I happened to be present when these men were questioned by Mr. Niimura, the civilian Japanese interpreter. His only interest seemed to be in what the Filipino civilians had told the prisoners, and what the prisoners had told the Filipinos. He showed no concern over the question of food, pointing out that he was concerned only with the propaganda aspect of the situation. He wanted to know if the Filipinos had given the Americans any news about the progress of the war, and whether the Americans had said anything that might have encouraged the Filipinos to revolt against the Japa-



nese. He got nowhere, for the simple reason that the prisoners had been interested only in acquiring food.

The five Americans and two Filipinos, as punishment, were tied up to stakes just outside the camp and allowed no food or water for forty-eight hours. In tying one of the Americans, the Japanese guards had done a bungling job, and this man finally found that he could wriggle out of his bonds. The midday heat was almost unbearable. At about noon of the second day, this enlisted man apparently became crazed by the combination of heat, hunger and thirst. He jerked out of his bonds and ran to the stockade gate and let himself in. Once inside his own barracks he got some water and then went to his own bunk and lay down.

Despite the fact that this prisoner voluntarily ran back inside the prison stockade, the Japs made a great commotion over their charge of attempted escape. At about five o'clock that afternoon all of us were herded into our barracks under guard. The barracks were so flimsily constructed, however, that it was impossible to prevent the prisoners from seeing what went on outside. Those prisoners who were near enough thus could look through the chinks in their barracks as the Japanese lined up the five Americans and two Filipinos and executed them by rifle fire. There was no trial.

COMMANDER MCCOY: The problem of food at Cabanatuan was always a pressing one. Despite the fact that the food the Japs gave us was deadly in its monotony, we were never at any one meal given as much as we wanted to eat.

For breakfast at Cabanatuan we were rationed one mess kit of lugao, a thin concoction of rice and water. At noon and at night we received one mess kit of steamed white rice, with about one-half canteen cup of a greenish-colored soup, usually with no substance in it. When there was substance, it consisted of camote tops, the leafy part of the Philippine sweet potato. In the five months I was at Cabanatuan, the only piece of meat I ever received was a half-inch cube of a carabao which had died on the prison confines. This great event happened once.

On one occasion the Japs gave us three chickens and nine eggs for each mess of five hundred men—doubtless so they could claim in their propaganda that we were fed on chickens and eggs. After my escape, and return to the States, I was shown Japanese propaganda statements which declared that American prisoners of war in the Philippines are given the same diet as that received by the Japanese soldier. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* Such a fare, to us, would have seemed sheer luxury. For breakfast the Japanese soldier has a

vitaminized mush with his rice. At noon he has fish, pork or chicken and vegetables with his rice. At night he has his biggest meal, and meat is always served with it. Such menus to the American prisoners now in the Philippines would make every day seem like Christmas.

The diet we received at Cabanatuan would not sustain normal life. This was amply proved by the neat rows of bodies placed outside the barracks each morning.

Because of this fact, every effort was made to supplement our diet by any means within our power. The Japanese finally set up a system by which we could buy food, if we had money, and provided the orders were placed well in advance. It was therefore possible, if a prisoner had about 25 pesos a month, to eke out an existence without becoming a victim of scurvy, beri beri or other illnesses brought about by diet deficiency.

Prisoners without any money, or without friends from whom they could borrow, were almost certain to face illness and probable death.

Before the camp store was put on an efficient basis, a thriving black market sprang up within our stockade. In this respect, and in describing Japanese brutalities, I would be incorrect if I implied that all of our own people were completely without shortcomings—there were about as many anti-

social acts within the prison camp as would be found in a village of similar size in the United States. The difference, of course, was that in the prison camp the provocation was thousands of times greater. And the black market within our camp was later corrected by our own efforts.

In June and July of 1942 the death rate of Cabanatuan was 30 Americans a day. Each morning a fresh batch of bodies was brought out of the barracks and laid out in rows to await burial. This sometimes was a matter of days. First we had to receive permission from the Japanese to take the bodies outside the camp to the burial ground. This permission was always delayed, because it upset the Japs' roll call. Then there was the problem of finding a burial detail, prisoners who were strong enough to carry the bodies out of the camp on our homemade stretchers and then dig the graves. As a result, bodies were always lying around the camp. Aside from the ever-present stench, and the swarms of flies, sanitary conditions were not helped. Not until late August did the Japs finally consent to let us mark our graves, and allow our chaplains to hold burial services over the dead.

One of my friends and barracks-mates, Lieutenant Commander A. E. Harris, USN, became critically ill of malaria and dietary complications. For

four days he was unconscious, emitting an occasional respiratory rattle which could be heard throughout the entire barracks. During those four days we made every effort to have Harris transferred to the hospital. Although there were no medicines for him, he would at least have had the care of trained doctors and hospital corpsmen. Permission to remove Commander Harris was finally obtained on the fourth day, but he died while being taken through the hospital gates. Such occurrences were not uncommon.

Our contact with the Japanese prison officials was carried on by the camp commanders whom we ourselves had chosen from among our most able senior officers. The job of these camp officials was a hard and thankless one, for the Japanese interpreters at the camp headquarters, usually non-combatants, were particularly fond of slapping American prisoners on the slightest provocation, or no provocation at all.

The experience of a lieutenant colonel who was executive officer of our camp is a case in point. I will not give his name, as it would cause unnecessary worry to his family. On a visit to Japanese prison headquarters, he was struck behind the ear with a heavy riding crop by a Jap interpreter, a civilian. This injury was aggravated by another beating he received at another camp to which we

were later transferred. When I last saw this lieutenant colonel, just before my escape, he suffered from periodic headaches which were extremely painful, and he had a growing paralysis on one side. It is doubtful whether he is still alive.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: For the first three months of its existence, Cabanatuan Prison Camp was commanded by Japanese non-coms. After it had been somewhat organized we heard that the command was to be transferred to a commissioned officer. We had great hopes that this change of command would result in less severe discipline, better food, and particularly in better hospital care for the many of our fellow prisoners who were ill or dying. Then came the day of the new commander's arrival. He was a lieutenant colonel, a little on the stout side, and with a bristling black moustache.

"Holy cow," said an enlisted man who was peering through the fence near where I was standing. "Look at old Mori."

"Who is Mori?" I asked.

"Used to run a bicycle shop in Manila. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth—he couldn't be nice enough to us guys in uniform."

Apparently, Lieutenant Colonel Mori had a very convenient memory, for as far as I was able

to learn he did not seem to recall any of his former clients from his bicycle-shop days.

And the change in our treatment, if any, was not discernible—it would have required nothing short of genius on the part of a new commander to make matters worse. There was, however, one temporary change for the better in the matter of hospital supplies. The Philippine Red Cross in Manila had quinine available and was willing to supply it to us. The Japs were in no hurry about accepting this medicine, however.

When the quinine finally did arrive it was allowed to remain unpacked for days, the Japanese giving the excuse that the supplies had to be inventoried before they could be used. A small amount was given to us in late September.

Nevertheless, the death rate among the American prisoners dropped from 30 per day in July to 21 per day in August, principally due to the fact that many of the weaker ones had already died. September showed an all-time low of 14 per day, but this rose to 19 per day in October. By the middle of October the small supply of quinine had been used up, and deaths from malaria were on the increase. On one red-letter day in October, however, there were only three deaths in the camp. A notice to this effect was published, and there was much optimism. The next day, however, the death

rate was up again, with nearly a score of bodies being dragged out of the barracks the following morning.

On one other occasion the Japs themselves voluntarily supplied us with medicine. That was in August, when an epidemic of diphtheria broke out in the prison. Obviously to protect themselves, the Japs gave us some antitoxin. Fortunately the disease was not in a virulent form, and deaths from this cause were few.

Almost no prisoner in the camps escaped from a skin disorder in one form or another, and nearly all of us experienced peculiar swellings of various glands. By mid-September my fingers and feet began to ache severely from beri beri. Our doctors showed us how to make up a yeast compound from our rice, and the vitamin content probably arrested some cases of beri beri, although it cured none. Many of our diet deficiency cases were slowly losing their eyesight.

At the time I left Cabanatuan in October, 1942, being transferred to another camp, approximately 3000 persons had died there. 2200 had died earlier at Camp O'Donnell, not counting the unknown number killed by the Japanese or who died on the death march from Bataan. This makes a known total of more than 5000 Americans dead by October, 1942. Up until the end of 1943 the Japanese



had released the names of only 1800 dead. I am certain that there have been many, many deaths at Cabanatuan since I last saw that place.

Most of the people who died at Cabanatuan were men who had been captured on Bataan. For instance, one National Guard colonel told me that in his regiment of 1,000, 25 had been killed and 75 were missing at the fall of Bataan, but that 453 additional men had died for various reasons while in the hands of the Japanese.

One of the heroes of the prison (and there were many) was a National Guard officer from New Mexico, Lieutenant Colonel Cane, of the 200th Coast Artillery. Colonel Cane made every effort to ease the lot of the sick and the hungry, and often interceded on their behalf with the Japanese prison officials. On one occasion, he was struck brutally by Mr. Niimura, the interpreter, and he lay on the floor, unconscious, for nearly an hour. (Mr. Niimura, incidentally, formerly operated an electrical shop at Baguio, the most fashionable resort in the Philippines, and he doubtless will be remembered by many Americans.) On another occasion, Colonel Cane had managed to get a tin of sardines from the minute stock in the prison store, and I accompanied him as he took this great delicacy to a patient in the hospital. I was appalled by the conditions there, with no medicines, and with the

doctors and hospital corpsmen as sick as their patients. The place was a stink-hole, with fecal matter on the floors, and with flies as plentiful as in our own camp. Only by heroic efforts were the doctors and corpsmen able to accomplish anything at all.

During all my five months at Cabanatuan we were never given anything to do except for the cleaning of our barracks, latrines, and the burial of our dead. About 100 enlisted men were detailed to gather firewood for the camp, and for this purpose they were given a captured American truck. After I left Cabanatuan I learned that the gasoline shortage had forced the Japs to discontinue use of the truck, so the prisoners had to walk several miles and carry the wood on their backs.

To pass the time, several officers started classes in various subjects. The Japs did not object to this as long as we did not attempt to teach foreign languages. We never knew why this latter subject was banned. Surreptitiously, I did manage to keep up my Russian, by secretly practicing with other officers who spoke the language. McCoy, I remember, started a class in calculus, having been something of a mathematics shark since his days at Annapolis.

On one occasion a young regular Army lieutenant remarked, "Why don't we get up a ball game?"

"We have no gear," one of us in the group pointed out.

A request for baseball gear was put through. Much to our surprise the Japanese supplied us with a small quantity of softball gear almost immediately—apparently they had had it on hand, and just hadn't bothered or cared enough to issue it. There was very little of this equipment, so each man got to play on an average of about once a week. One of the star players on McCoy's team, by the way, was Captain W. E. Dyess, the Bataan air ace, one of the ten of us who finally escaped. (After our escape and return to the United States, Dyess, by then promoted to lieutenant colonel, was killed in a tragic accident when his P-38 crashed in Burbank, California, just three days before Christmas, 1943.)

About once a week our chaplains arranged amateur theatricals or skits. The Japanese guards were usually the most appreciative spectators at these events, but all of us looked forward to them, despite what must be sadly admitted as a very low entertainment value. On an afternoon in late August, rumor quickly ran through the prison that the entertainment for that night had been canceled.

"Why?" I asked.

"Our three escapees are back," I was informed. "The Japanese are making them put on a show."

We did not know what turn this "show" would take, and we looked forward to it with foreboding. In this instance, however, our fears were worse than the facts. These three Naval Reserve ensigns, as I have said, simply walked out of the prison on our first night in the camp, and before the stockades had been put up. As we learned later, the three had hidden out in the jungle for three months. Food was plentiful, easily obtainable, and they could have stayed there indefinitely. However, they wanted to get out of the Philippines, so they made their way to the more thickly populated coast of the island of Luzon. The Japanese were in force on the coast, and the penalty for a Filipino harboring an American was death. In fact, even a suspicion was enough to cause a Filipino to be executed. The three ensigns decided that without help escape would be hopeless, so they voluntarily turned themselves in.

That evening after our meal, and while it was still light, these three young officers were required to mount a platform in the center of the camp and read prepared statements about the hardships they had undergone while they were away from the camp. They told of weeks without food, of jungle water infested with bugs and poisonous insects, of venomous snakes and ferocious wild beasts.

Actually, none of the Americans in the camp was fooled. The ensigns had been beaten up when they first gave themselves up, but beyond their bruises they looked better than any prisoner in the camp. They were occasionally cuffed around by the guards after their return, but theirs was the mildest punishment given out by the Japs during all my months in prison.

Our prison quickly slipped back into its monotony, but in September we were notified by the prison officials that we were to be visited for an inspection by a very high Japanese personage. We were all ordered to police up the prison, and to appear in our best clothes on the appointed date. Our three group commanders were warned very sternly not to talk to the great personage, but only to give a brief but respectful answer to any questions.

Our visitor turned out to be a Japanese general. The Japanese prison officials bowed and smirked obsequiously as they escorted him about. The commander of my group was called forth to accompany the general on the inspection of our group.

This officer courageously pointed out any number of American officers and enlisted men who were too ill to stand in the ranks. "We have very many sick here," he pointed out.

The Japanese general spoke excellent English. He wanted to know why.

Our group commander accompanied our visitor to the mess barracks. "Here is why," he said, pointing to the noon-day meal of white rice and thin camote-top soup. "We are all starving."

"That will be enough," the Japanese general snapped. "Your men are not starving. They need more exercise."

The courageous American officer tried to say more. The guards quickly restrained him, and the Japanese general curtly turned on his heel and continued his inspection with an air of boredom and indifference.

COMMANDER MCCOY: The escape and eventual return of the three Naval ensigns ended with what was the lightest of punishment by Japanese standards; but another escape attempt, in September of 1942, had a far different outcome.

This unfortunate attempt was made by two Army officers and an officer in the Civil Engineer Corps, Navy. I shall not give the names of these men, because I believe their families should be spared the details.

On a very dark night, the three officers were carrying out a plan to escape by attempting to crawl along a ditch and thereby get through the

wire around the camp. They had almost reached their objective when their progress was accidentally halted; an Army enlisted man, said to have been a former Notre Dame football star, stumbled into the three men in the dark.

Whatever his reasons, one of the officers sprang from the ditch and began to struggle with the enlisted man. Other Americans ran out of their barracks to stop this fray, with the result that it became general and quite noisy. After the actual fighting stopped, the first officer to spring out of the ditch was quite loud in his recriminations, taking the attitude that there had been a deliberate attempt inside the camp to prevent his escape. The enlisted man denied this, and since he was not a member of the officer's "shooting squad," and so would not have suffered from the escape, he presumably was sincere in his denial.

At any rate, the irate officer used the word "escape" so often that it got to the ears of the Japanese. The three Americans were taken out of the camp, and after some questioning by the Japanese, their punishment was decided upon. The Japanese first beat the three Americans about the feet and calves until they were no longer able to stand. Then they kicked the men and jumped on them with all their weight.

After continuing this treatment for some time,

the Japanese waited until morning and then stripped the Americans of all their clothing except their shorts. The three men were then marched out into the Cabanatuan road to a point which was in full view of the camp. Their hands were tied behind them, and they were pulled up by ropes from an overhead purchase so that they had to remain standing, but bent forward to ease the pressure on their arms.

Then began forty-eight hours of intermittent torture, interrupted for a few moments while the three men were left exposed to a typhoon. Many of the prisoners went into their barracks so they would not be able to see what went on. The Japanese guards were ready with their sub-machine guns in case of any trouble. The Japanese periodically beat the men with a heavy board. Any Filipino unlucky enough to pass along the road was forced to strike the men in the face with this club. If the Japanese did not think the Filipinos put enough force into their blows, the Filipinos themselves were beaten. Where the three men were standing, the earth was spattered with blood for several feet in all directions. Their half-conscious groans and cries were horrible to hear.

The amazing thing was the ability of the three men to stay alive, if indeed they were still alive at the end of the second day of this treatment—they



were battered beyond recognition, with the ear of one prisoner hanging down to his shoulder.

I think we all prayed for the men during this ordeal. I know I did. And I am sure all of us said a prayer of relief when the Japanese finally cut the men down and took them away for execution. Two of the men were shot. The third was beheaded. There had at no time been the semblance of a trial.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: Toward the end of September or early in October we learned that a thousand prisoners were to be transferred to another prison camp, this one on the Island of Mindanao, to the southward. Both McCoy and I were among those selected to go. We did not know what to expect at the new camp, but I am sure we both felt that anything would be an improvement over the conditions at Cabanatuan.



# 4

## *Prison Farm at Davao*

OF THE approximately one thousand American prisoners of war who were being transferred from the Japanese prison camp at Cabanatuan, not one but was glad to go. None of us knew what the new prison would be like, or what conditions we would find there. We knew only that we would be leaving Cabanatuan and the Island of Luzon, and we felt certain that any change would be for the better. During more than five months since the fall of Corregidor, as military prisoners of the Japanese in the Philippines, we had seen nothing but starvation, illness, brutality and death.

We first learned of the chance to get away from Cabanatuan when the Japanese prison officials informed our camp commanders that two parties of prisoners were to be transferred to different camps. The Japs ordered our camp commanders to select one party of 400 men, all technicians, and all men whose health was good enough to withstand "a sea voyage to Japan." We later heard that the leader

of this party, a colonel, was working in the salt mines at Mukden. The second party was to number 1000 of the men who were weakest but who were still able to undergo "a sea voyage," destination unannounced. All those selected began preparations to leave.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: I will never forget my farewell to Cabanatuan. I was glad to go, no matter what lay ahead. But the departure had its element of sadness, too.

On the day we were to leave Cabanatuan I went around to say goodby to the many officers with whom I had served in better times at other stations, and also the many friends I had made in the prison. Many of them, I knew, would never live to welcome their freedom, unless it came in a matter of weeks, and this did not seem likely. One of these was an officer whom I had known almost since the day of my graduation at West Point. He was suffering from beri beri, and experienced excruciating pain in his fingers and toes. Also he had recurrent attacks of malaria, and he found it difficult to retain even the small amount of food which the Japanese allowed us.

As I came to say goodby, this officer stopped massaging his fingers and toes and shook hands

with me. Both of us knew that he did not have long to live. He took my hand and pressed it as firmly as his strength would allow. "Goodby, Steve," he said. "Best of luck, boy." That was all.

There are other pathetic memories of that parting, of my friends pressing small gifts on me as they assured me they would have no need for whatever the gift happened to be; and I, in turn, giving away some of my few precious possessions to close friends. Years of military training are supposed to teach an officer to keep a stiff upper lip, but there were times when I had to keep a firm grip on myself to prevent myself becoming a spectacle. I had seen plenty of heroism on Corregidor, but I will carry with me longest the memory of the little things at Cabanatuan. Perhaps those little things are remembered because they are man's unconscious striving to achieve nobility.

COMMANDER MCCOY: At the time of the transfer of prisoners from Cabanatuan none of us had as yet formed any clear plan of escape, although it was always in our minds. There were less than 200 Navy and Marine Corps personnel in the camp, as against some 8,000 Army, so a portion of our number was allowed to volunteer to go to the new camp. I was one of the volunteers.

I was convinced that staying at Cabanatuan

meant eventual death. Although I was one of the healthiest specimens in the camp, in five months I had already lost eighteen pounds. Therefore I was doubly glad I had volunteered when, in some inexplicable manner, word got around that we were to be sent to a prison colony on Mindanao, the farthest southward of the Philippine Islands, and about 600 statute miles on a direct line from Cabanatuan. I was interested in Mindanao because, although I had had no news for some time, I knew that island to be just 600 miles closer to the Netherlands Indies, New Guinea and Australia—all areas in which I presumed United States forces to be operating.

On October 26, 1942, our group of approximately 1000 prisoners left the camp for Manila. There we were placed aboard a 7000-ton freighter which the Japs had captured from the British in their drive down the east coast of the Asiatic mainland. We were loaded into two holds of the ship, but since there was not room for all hands, a number of us were placed on the unprotected deck. I was one of the lucky ones topside, while Mellnik was in the almost unbearably crowded confines of a cargo hold.

During the 11-day voyage to Davao Gulf, the Japanese at no time made any effort to identify this vessel as having prisoners of war aboard—I

am sure that any number of my fellow prisoners joined me in the hope that one of our subs would pop a fish into her, letting us take our own chances in the water. The most memorable highlight of this trip was the food. At noontime we were given a bit of dried fish with our rice, and at the evening meal we enjoyed a super-luxury—each of us was given a morsel of the canned corned beef which the Japs had captured when they took over the Cavite Navy Yard. Except for a few with money, none of us had tasted meat in months, or little else that was substantial. I can remember how those of us on deck turned this tidbit over in our mouths and luxuriated in the taste. (Once in awhile I get to thinking about the food rationing back here in the States, and I sit down and laugh like hell.)

On November 6th, at 8 in the morning, we tied up at the Lasang Lumber Dock near Davao City, on the Island of Mindanao. We were marched ashore and, waiting for the extreme heat of the day, as was usual with the Japanese when moving American prisoners, we began the 17-mile march to the Davao Penal Colony. As we marched, there was a single question in our minds: Will this be better than Cabanatuan, where starvation, brutality and death had been our ever-present companions?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: In prewar days, the Davao prison colony had been operated by the Philippine Bureau of Prisons, and had contained some 2000 convicts. All but 150 of these convicts had been transported to another prison near Puerta Princesa, Palawan, the 150 being retained to aid in the management of the prison farm. These 150 felons had been convicted of killing their fellow man in all the various degrees ranging from manslaughter to murder; but it is no exaggeration to say that not one of them but was kinder and more human than any of our Japanese guards. In fact, two of these convicts came along as willing guides when ten of us finally got free as the first party of American prisoners of war to escape from the Japs in the Philippines.

As we marched into the prison colony we were lined up for review by Major Maida, the Japanese prison commander. We could see that he was furious. Major Maida pointed at the great number in our ranks who were so ill they could barely stand. He stormed about, declaring that he had asked for prisoners capable of doing hard labor. Instead, he shouted, he had been sent a batch of walking corpses.

If Lieutenant Colonel Mori, the Japanese commander at Cabanatuan, had known of these requirements he had kept such knowledge to himself.



In fact, he had included many sick in our party, perhaps to avoid the trouble of having them die on his hands.

Major Maida outlined the kinds of work which awaited us, no matter what our wishes in the matter. This work included planting and harvesting rice; the planting and harvesting of corn, camotes and mongo beans; logging; the building of field fortifications, barbed wire entanglements and parapets for riflemen; plowing, and the miscellaneous slavey work of keeping up the Japanese camp area, such as the latrine detail. And it was at this time that Major Maida made us a speech.

"You have been used to a soft, easy life since your capture," Major Maida told us. "All that will be different here. Now you will learn about hard labor. Every prisoner will continue to work until he is actually hospitalized. Punishment for malingers will be severe."

Major Maida's orders were never relaxed.

Shortly after our arrival, the total number of American prisoners at Davao was brought to approximately 2000 by the addition of prisoners captured in the Visayan Islands and on Mindanao itself.

None of us will ever forget how good these prisoners looked when they first arrived—they were all in good physical condition, by comparison mak-

ing us look like scarecrows. These prisoners had not been exposed to pollution, disease and hunger as we had, most of them having surrendered or been captured some time after the fall of Corregidor. But it did not take them long to join our ranks. And when I escaped from Davao some five months later, only 1100 of our 2000 prisoners were working. The other 900 were too sick to work. American doctors in the prison hospital told me that, since almost no medicines were available, very few of these 900 had a chance to leave the hospital alive. They would go steadily downhill to the end.

Discipline at Davao was strict, and we soon found that one of our chief tormentors was First Lieutenant Hosume. Among ourselves, we very quickly named him "The Crown Prince of Swat."

According to a Jap guard at the prison, Hosume had distinguished himself in a couple of actions by doing his fighting at the rear. As a punishment, he was assigned to the prison detail at Davao, and he seemed bent on proving his bravery by smacking around every American prisoner in reach. I am only one of several hundred of these prisoners who quickly learned to cherish a fond hope of meeting up with Lieutenant Hosume after this war, with his judo to be matched against some plain, old-fashioned American fist-and-skull. God, what a treat!

At that, Lieutenant Hosume delayed our final

escape by one week, and caused us to fear that it would miscarry altogether.

In some ways the prison at Davao was far superior to the one at Cabanatuan. The food was still rice, but with each meal we received some vegetables such as camotes, green papayas, casavas, or cooking bananas. Also, once each day we were usually given a small portion of mongo beans, which are very nourishing. At least the food was better until January, when the Japanese took away everything but our three daily portions of white rice, a point which will be explained later.

However, a number of the prisoners from Cabanatuan were already suffering from beri beri, and even the improved diet at first given us at Davao was not enough to keep them from sliding backward. Advanced cases of beri beri were sent to the hospital. It was a pathetic sight to visit the hospital and watch the people sitting all day, massaging their aching toes and fingers. In this affliction the patient loses appetite and usually requires a narcotic to induce sleep. No narcotics or sedatives, of course, were available.

We had been at Davao military prison farm only a day or so when a heavy thunderstorm came up, causing a creek which ran through the camp to overflow its banks. The creek ran through a lemon grove above the camp and literally hundreds of these lemons—the Philippine variety that

are as big as our oranges—came floating down the stream. These lemons, with their vitamins and acids, were just what was needed for those suffering from diet deficiency, and a group of us began to gather them in.

In the matter of the lemons, we had reckoned without the Crown Prince of Swat. Hosume and his minions were upon us at once, slapping and cuffing us about, and emitting a streak of imprecations.

The Japanese, it seemed, did not like lemons, so we were not to have them. This statement of course does not make sense, but it was the only reason we were ever given. And neither were we allowed to have any of the other fruits and vegetables which grew in profusion throughout the prison farm, except those which we could achieve by theft. Needless to say, most of us soon became adept at thievery, particularly those of us who were strong enough to go on work details at some distance from the prison camp. And at the grave risk of being caught, we made every effort to smuggle in enough fruit and vegetables for those who were too weak to steal for themselves.

COMMANDER MCCOY: Almost since the day of arrival at Mindanao there had been lurking in my mind the thought of escape, the hope that some

avenue would open itself, that some opportunity would be provided. Nothing concrete came of these gropings all through November and December. There were the usual six days of work each week, with Sundays quite often thrown in as a work day when Lieutenant Hosume caught us stealing food.

Early in January, I was assigned as the officer in charge of a detail to work the prison's coffee plantation. In this detail were about 35 officers, all older than forty, and mostly lieutenant colonels. These older men had been assigned to this detail as a result of considerable undercover maneuvering on the part of the American officials of the prison, in order that they might have a better chance of stealing food enough to keep them alive.

I was assisted on this detail by Mellnik—he and I were the only younger officers in the group—and it was here that Steve and I began to plan our attempt to escape. After I had mentioned the plan to him, Mellnik gave it careful thought, which was his custom. Once he had decided, he never once faltered at any point; in fact, he came up with some of the better ideas that finally made our escape possible.

At Mellnik's suggestion we wangled two sergeants to assist with the mid-day cooking for our work party—Sergeants Paul Marshall and R. B. Spielman. Marshall and Spielman were taken in

on the escape plan, and at once proved both eager and helpful. Our hope was to make a break out of the prison farm, elude our guards, reach the coast, and set out in a stolen sailboat. We were not too enthusiastic about our chances for a successful escape. On the other hand, neither were we too enthusiastic about our chances for staying alive if we remained in the hands of the Japs.

The escape plan had not yet matured, however, when there occurred an event which brightened the lives of all the American prisoners, at least temporarily.

As I was returning from work one afternoon in early January, I was met near the prison barracks by an enlisted seaman who had been attached to my unit at the Cavite Navy Yard, before the fall of Corregidor.

"It's Christmas, Commander McCoy!" he shouted. "It's Christmas!"

I was well aware that Christmas had already passed, practically without notice, so I asked him to explain his excitement.

"Stuff from home," he babbled. "Boxes from the States. Red Cross boxes."

I had quickened my pace, and by now I was trotting along beside him. Then I must confess that both of us broke into a run, a headlong dash for the barracks.

The news was true. There were, indeed, Red Cross boxes, and two for each prisoner. More than that, they meant to each of us—home. As each prisoner ripped open a box, I suspect that there were many besides myself who worked with a catch in the throat.

I will make no attempt to describe the joy with which those Red Cross boxes were received. Just as there is no word for "truth" in the Japanese language, neither are there any words known to me which could describe the feelings with which we greeted this first communication from our homeland. And what a welcome message those boxes contained!

First of all, there was coffee—a concentrate which tasted better than any steaming cup I had ever drunk to cheer an icy night on the bridge of a ship at sea. It was the first I had tasted since a smuggled sip months ago in Old Bilibid Prison, back in Manila. There were chocolate bars, there was cheese, there were crackers and cookies, there were tinned meats and sardines, there were cigarettes, and there was a portion each of tea, cocoa, salt, pepper and sugar. Best of all, there were sulfa drugs and precious quinine!

Since I did not smoke, I very quickly made an advantageous trade for my cigarettes—the only tobacco available for those who used it was a

coarse native leaf which grew within the prison confines. Often this was not available, and the prisoners resorted to cornsilk and dried leaves. In my trading, however, I could find nobody who would give up a crumb of his cheese: we had known no butter, milk or any kind of dairy product since our capture. . . . Our Christmas had been delayed, but it was one of the most enjoyable many of us will ever remember.

In addition to the two boxes received by each prisoner, each of us also received fifteen cans of corned beef or meat-and-vegetable stew. This was rationed to us by the Japanese at the rate of two cans a week, and it therefore lasted us approximately eight weeks. The food during those eight weeks was the best and most nourishing I received in all the eleven months of my imprisonment by the Japanese.

But our belated Christmas rejoicings had a dark side, too. In the first place, we learned that our precious Red Cross supplies had been received aboard a diplomatic ship back in June of 1942, in Japan. We never learned why it took them some seven months to reach us in Davao. More catastrophic was the fact that, as soon as our boxes were received, the Japanese promptly discontinued the meager supply of vegetables which we had been rationed in the past. And when each man had



eaten the last of his fifteen cans of meat, the vegetables still were withheld from us.

In short, we were back on the same rations we had received at Cabanatuan—lugao in the morning, and rice with a half-canteen cupful of watery camote-top soup for the other two meals.

This was in March of 1943, and by that time our plans for escape had gone well forward, with myself as senior officer and with Mellnik as executive.

"How far is it to Australia from here, Commander?" Sergeant Marshall asked me one day, while we were out on the coffee detail.

"About sixteen hundred miles to one of the nearest points," I answered. "Melville, for instance."

"And you mean, if we can find a sailboat, you can take us there?"

"Within ten or fifteen miles of any place on the map. Provided, of course, that we can rig up some halfway decent navigating equipment."

And provided, of course, that we had a lot of luck with the weather, and the Japs didn't stop us. But I kept these thoughts to myself.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: McCoy, as senior officer, was to lead our escape group, and was to do the navigating once we were able to steal a boat. When and if we reached the coast, and when and if we were able to steal a boat. Mean-

while, I was doing much of the planning, and was responsible for executing most of the preparatory detail.

The first step decided upon was to put ourselves in as good physical condition as possible. Sergeant Spielman had earned a reputation as a food thief deluxe, so he and McCoy and I now turned our combined talents and attention to the chicken farm kept by the Japanese for their own exclusive use—they thought. There were some 1500 of these chickens, and we made it a point of honor never to take less than two on a single raid, and including as many eggs as could be safely carried. By an elaborate system of watchers, McCoy and Spielman and I relieved the Japs of a total of 133 of their plumpest fowls over a period of three months.

After we had stolen 75 of these chickens the Japanese noted their losses. Thereafter we had to work with infinitely more guile, for we knew that, if caught, we would be punished with a severity ranging from a mere flogging to death by torture.

Some of these chickens we ate at the noon meal we cooked for ourselves while working in the coffee plantation, dividing them with the older officers in our work party. Others we traded for almost non-existent quinine, sulfa drugs and any other article which we considered might be useful

on our trip through the jungle and onward to Australia.

COMMANDER MCCOY: In early March, our plans were given an entirely new twist. At that time I was approached by Captain A. C. Shofner, United States Marine Corps. Shofner reported that he and five other Army and Marine Corps officers were planning an escape. They would like me to take charge, if I so desired.

Captain Shofner's party was headed by himself and Captain W. E. Dyess, the famous Bataan ace. In addition, there were two other Marine Corps officers, First Lieutenants Jack Hawkins and Michael Dobervich; and two other Army officers, Second Lieutenants Samuel Grashio, who had flown with Dyess on Bataan, and L. A. Boelens.

Our two groups now merged, and we added to our party two Filipino convicts who were serving time for murder, Beningno de la Cruz and Victorio Jumarung.

We all knew that if the Japanese learned of our attempt to escape, or caught us in the attempt, our punishment would not be pleasant to consider—we had seen too much of Japanese-devised torture and death since we had become prisoners of war.

Lieutenant Boelens said that he would impro-

wise a sextant out of the scrap material which he could find about the camp. He not only kept his promise—he did a bang-up good job into the bargain. In some manner, Mellnik was able to lay his hands on a book on astronomy, and I was able to obtain the necessary data on the principal stars, and also the equation of time. We were also able to obtain the proper altitude corrections; and since I could compute the correct ascension and declination of the sun, I felt prepared to navigate within reasonable limits. I also had a pocket watch which had a fairly constant rate, and whose error I determined by comparing the watch with the time of apparent local noon. (I found, when finally I was able to get a time tick by radio, that I was only fifteen seconds off.)

All in all, at the beginning of March, plans for our attempted escape were beginning to look good.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: We now selected March 28th as the date for our escape. This was a Sunday, and we figured that once clear we would have as much as eight hours start before the Japs discovered our absence.

Things were steadily getting worse in the prison camp, particularly among those prisoners who were too weak to go on work details, and thus were unable to steal any food. The problem of smug-

gling in food to these prisoners was also becoming harder, as the Jap guards had begun to search most of us when we returned from the prison farm at the end of each day's work.

Conditions in the camp only spurred our determination to make a break. Of the working prisoners, very few had footgear of any kind. It is still a nightmarish memory to think of American prisoners, their bodies weakened by malaria and beri beri, working in rice paddies with mud and water up to their waists. Eight hundred of the prisoners were in a separate compound as unfit for work. These were the prisoners partially or totally blind due to diet deficiencies, those whose beri beri kept them from walking, those with severe hernia, and others with various illnesses. Two hundred others had already been removed to the hospital as totally unable to care for themselves, and this number was increasing daily. Almost no medicines were available for any of these prisoners.

At about this time—early in the second week in March—an Army lieutenant colonel in charge of a sugar cane detail attempted to smuggle some cut sugar cane to the American prisoners in the hospital. The lieutenant colonel was caught by a guard, cuffed about, and taken to Jap headquarters. As punishment, the American camp commander and his adjutant—both chosen as such by

the prisoners themselves—were severely slapped. The lieutenant colonel was tied to a stake for 24 hours. He was beaten severely; and although he did not die at once, it is doubtful if he is still alive. He had already been permanently injured in previous beatings.

On March 14th, we rehearsed our carefully planned escape route, but without taking any of our equipment. We were overjoyed to find that we apparently had not been spotted from any of the watch towers or observation posts. Then, on March 26th, we began to sneak our equipment into the jungles. (The Japanese, incidentally, will not voluntarily go into the Philippine jungles unless they are armed and in force. The reason for this is the fact that very little is contributed to the New Order in East Asia by a Japanese with his head cut off.) We continued to sneak our equipment into the jungles on the next day, which was Saturday. One of our worst danger points was a guardhouse, which had to be passed if we were to get our equipment out safely.

Captain Dyess remembered that the sentries at this guardhouse were very partial to the fruit which was gathered for use by the Japanese, and which usually was brought by this spot. On the day before we planned to escape, we placed our equipment in the bottom of a bull cart driven by Dyess and

Mellnik. The equipment was then hidden by covering it with a load of small logs. On the back of the cart was placed a burlap bag of star apples, such as was often delivered in this manner to the Japanese quartermaster.

The plan worked without a hitch. The Jap sentry took his usual rake-off of the star apples and waved the cart on. The equipment was safely hidden in the jungle.

But we had reckoned without Lieutenant Hosume, the Crown Prince of Swat.

At noon that day, the day before we were to make our break, Hosume made an inspection to see if any of the work parties were using forbidden food, such as fruits or vegetables, each man's noon portion of rice being doled out before the work parties left in the morning. In Captain Shofner's musette bag was a bottle containing the entire quinine supply for our escape.

Hosume opened the bag and looked in. The quinine was in plain view. Captain Shofner said later that he established a new world's record for holding the breath.

Fortunately for us all, the Crown Prince of Swat had a one-track mind: he was looking for forbidden food and he saw none in the bag. After slapping around the men in Shofner's party, he continued on his honorable and exalted way.

All our plans were made. Our equipment was in the jungle, and if we got away on the following day, there was little danger that it would be found meantime and betray us.

That night we received very disturbing news. Lieutenant Hosume *had* found forbidden food in possession of one of the work parties. As a general punishment, all hands were ordered to work in the rice fields the following day—the Sunday on which we were to have made our escape. Our equipment was hidden in the edge of the jungle, where it might be discovered at any moment by the Japanese, and thus give us away.

But we had no choice. Our escape attempt would have to be postponed for at least a week. We were plenty scared.



# 5

## *Escape from the Japs*

THE WEEK following the Sunday on which we had planned to escape from the Davao Prison Camp, on the Island of Mindanao, was one in which all of us lived in a state of constant alarm. Each time a Jap guard approached any member of our intended escape party, that member was certain that the Japanese had stumbled onto the equipment we had hidden in the jungle the week before, and that the end had come. In the eleven months since the fall of the last American military stronghold in the Philippines, we had come to know our Japanese captors too well to hold out any hope of leniency in the event of discovery. We had not been able to take our escape equipment far into the jungle—our presence would have been missed—and there was always the off chance that a wandering Japanese soldier would find it.

As each day passed without discovery, each of us sent up a prayer of thanks. And each of us

prayed that, on the coming Sunday, we would not be punished by an order to work.

Our luck held.

Perhaps one reason we were not discovered was the fact that the Japanese guards at Davao Prison Camp were not the highest type of enemy soldier we had met in the months of our captivity since the fall of Bataan and Corregidor. There were about 250 of them to guard the 2000 American military prisoners. If this number of Japanese guards should seem small, it should be remembered that more than a thousand of the prisoners were so weak from disease and hunger that they probably would not have been able to escape if there had been no guards at all. Most of our Japanese guards were former white collar workers, army reservists from Formosa, and we hopefully took this as a sign that the Japanese needed their more seasoned fighters elsewhere.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: Sunday, April 4th, 1943, was now the date set for our escape, either to freedom or to a fate none of us cared to dwell upon in our thoughts. As I was returning to the barracks with the work detail from the coffee plantation on Thursday of that week, we noticed a new alertness on the part of the prison guards. We thought the worst had come, that our hidden

escape gear had been discovered, and that we were walking to our doom.

Once at the barracks, nothing immediately happened. We stowed our work gear—used in picking the coffee beans, and in pruning the trees of parasitic and non-productive branches—and I assigned Sergeants Spielman and Marshall to scout for news. Marshall was the first to return.

“We’ve got to watch our step,” said Marshall. “There was some trouble today. The Japs may be onto something.”

“What happened?”

“Jap sentry shot down a hospital orderly. Said he was trying to escape.”

“Was he trying to escape?”

“No, sir. We can’t figure it out, unless maybe the damn’ Jap just had trigger itch.”

The facts, when they came out, proved that the hospital orderly had *not* been attempting to escape. He was an Army enlisted man, and he had been digging camotes just outside the hospital stockade, and almost directly underneath a Jap sentry tower. The camotes were to be added to the sparse diet of rice and thin soup rationed to the hospital patients. (Prisoners not in hospital were allowed no vegetables at all.)

As it was an extremely hot day, this hospital orderly—whom we will call Bunkley—called in-

side the stockade and asked a buddy to toss over a canteen of water. Bunkley's buddy complied.

Bunkley was about to drink from the canteen when the Jap guard in the sentry tower suddenly yelled at him. Wondering at the commotion, and not understanding the Japanese words being shouted at him, Bunkley tilted the canteen and spilled some of the liquid to show the Japanese that it was nothing more than water. That was Bunkley's mistake, although we were never able to find out just why.

The Jap guard shouted again and then flung up his rifle and pulled the trigger. The bullet entered at the junction of the neck and shoulder and came out through the hip.

Bunkley yelled out, as he staggered, "My God—don't shoot me again."

The sentry poured two more bullets into Bunkley's body, and then fired the remaining shots in his clip at Bunkley's buddy inside the hospital compound, who by this time was running for dear life for the safety of the barracks. This second man was not hit.

The next day the Japanese commander informed our own prison headquarters that Bunkley had been shot while trying to escape, and that they were sorry that the incident had occurred. That closed the entire matter.

Bunkley was murdered in cold blood. There was no evidence to support the statement that he had been trying to escape. We examined his effects in the hospital after the shooting. He was carrying no food or equipment of any kind. No sane person would have attempted to brave the jungle in such a manner.

But there was no thought of turning back among our little escape party of ten, although this event served to increase our caution. We were so cautious, in fact, that as far as I know none of the prisoners outside our party had any suspicion of our plans.

COMMANDER MCCOY: The two days after the shooting of Bunkley, Friday and Saturday, were the two longest days in my memory.

On Sunday morning I got up early and began to hide my homemade charts, extra clothing, medicines, etc., underneath my usual garments. Very carefully, I placed in an inner pocket three fragile piña cloth handkerchiefs which I had found in a tunnel on Corregidor on the day of surrender, and which I devoutly hoped I would some day be able to present to my wife, Betty Anne, and my two little daughters, Anne and Jean. There was barely room underneath my clothing for my precious mosquito netting—all the remaining space in my

musette bag had been filled by another of my most valuable possessions, a half-roll of toilet paper which also had been hoarded from Corregidor.

"Where are you going with the mosquito netting?" asked an elderly lieutenant colonel, one of the occupants of my barracks.

I wanted to tell the lieutenant colonel of our plans, and invite him to come along, for he was a personal friend. But we had all agreed that we would not involve any of the other American prisoners in our escape plan; when questioned later by the Japs they would be able to give honest and innocent answers. And, like the majority of the other prisoners in the camp, the lieutenant colonel questioning me was in such poor physical condition that he could not have withstood the hardships which we expected to face in the jungles.

"This net? I'm going to wash it during the noon rest hour today. It's full of bedbugs again."

"But we don't work today—this is Sunday."

For the moment I had forgotten.

"I know," I replied lamely. "I'm taking out a part of my detail to build a rain shelter in the coffee plantation. We've been coming in soaked every night."

This latter statement was true; and if he suspected anything he did not say so.

One member of our party, Captain Shofner,

United States Marine Corps, was in charge of a plowing detail. It was comparatively easy for him to get out of the prison confines on the logical ground that he was going to change the grazing location of the Indian steers used in plowing the fields of the prison farm. With him were the other two Marine officers, First Lieutenants Jack Hawkins and Michael Dobervich, and also Second Lieutenant Samuel Grashio, the Army pilot who had flown with Dyess on Bataan.

The escape problem for my party was somewhat harder. In this party, besides Mellnik and myself, were Dyess and Second Lieutenant L. A. Boelens, of the Army Air Corps, and Sergeants R. B. Spielman and Paul Marshall.

The first test to face us was the main gate, leading from the prison confines into the prison farm. This we somehow passed safely, despite the bulky appearance caused by the articles hidden underneath our clothing.

Once out of sight of the gate we quickly ducked into a coconut grove and began to sneak Indian-fashion toward the spot in the jungle where we had previously hidden our equipment. At one point we had to cross a prison road which was always patrolled by a Jap sentry—there was no other way to go. When we reached this spot we formed into ranks and marched boldly into view. As we passed

the sentry I called for "eyes left," and as the others complied I gave a snappy salute. This we never did except with an occasional guard who was a little less severe than the others; in payment for his kindness we thus attempted to give him "face" with his superiors. In this present case the Jap apparently was so surprised that he returned the salute and smirked toothily as we marched on past.

Shortly we had joined the other party and had gathered around our equipment, now soggy from a week of rain, and much of it useless. But we were in the jungle. And, for the first time, we began to breathe with the feeling that we had a chance to get free.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: There was a fearful and impatient wait for more than an hour due to the absence of one of the Filipino prisoners who were to guide us, both convicted and sentenced for murder prior to the outbreak of war, and both kept on at the prison to aid in supervising the farm work after the other civilian felons had been sent away to make room for the American prisoners of war. These men, Benigno de la Cruz and Victorio Jumarung, helped us without any thought of gain for themselves. They did ask that, if any of us got free, we would intercede with President Quezon to have them restored to free-



dom once the Japanese invaders have been ousted. (One of my first acts, upon finally reaching the United States, was to go to Saranac, New York, to see the great President of the Philippines. It was not necessary to make any kind of request of Quezon, for he granted it before it was asked. In one man's opinion, Manuel Quezon is a great statesman and a gallant fighting man.)

Of our two guides, only Victorio previously had made a journey through the jungles which we now faced. But, within an hour, he was forced to admit that he was lost. There was a hurried consultation, whereupon we decided to travel wholly by compass. And we knew that the aid of Ben and Victor would be invaluable, because of their knowledge of jungle travel.

The jungle heat was oppressive, the noise broken only by our own careful progress, the squawk of startled birds, or the chatter of occasional beady-eyed and elusive monkeys. Soon we were in swamp, with water up to our knees and in sharp-edged coogan grass that grew over our heads. We had to hack our way every step.

At night we finally found a place to camp—here the water was only ankle deep. By cutting off boughs from trees we managed to build crude structures which would keep our blankets above water. When we turned in, all of us were near the

point of exhaustion, and all of us slept the sleep of the dead. As a result, none of us aroused when the water rose during the night, and we awoke to find ourselves half-floating in our beds.

On the second morning McCoy awoke with a feeling of illness. It was a considerable task for him to summon enough strength during the day to keep himself from falling out—he said that, if this happened, he would expect the rest of us to go on. Somehow, he managed to keep going. And we were all glad we had not had to stop; for at about 5:00 P.M., we heard the sound of rifle and machine-gun fire at a distance of about two or three kilometers, in the direction from which we had just come. And, the next morning, McCoy's indisposition had cleared away without leaving him in the throes of dysentery or malaria, as we had feared.

As an example of the hard going of the Philippine jungle, at the end of the fourth day we had not progressed more than twelve miles from our escape point. And we soon found obvious evidence that the Japs had been on the hunt for us—evidence in the shape of an empty .303 ammunition clip, and the remains of food which the Jap search party had eaten.

Shortly thereafter, on a morning while we were still at breakfast, Captain Dyess was standing

guard when he saw two armed Filipinos. The Filipinos saw Dyess at the same time, and one of them made motions as if he had attempted to fire. Dyess called to the Filipinos, but they quietly faded into the jungle.

Later that day we headed down a more open trail, and shortly we met up with a native whose trail we were able to follow to a small village. In this village two of the natives admitted that they had been the ones seen in the jungle by Dyess. They thought he was a Jap, they said; one of them had taken careful aim on Dyess and had pulled the trigger. Dyess owed his life to a faulty cartridge or firing pin.

But the natives gave us news. In some manner they had learned that the Japs believed we had escaped in an effort to round up a raiding party and attack the prison to avenge the murder of Bunkley. As a result, 200 Japanese reinforcements had been hastily added to the Jap garrison at the prison.

COMMANDER MCCOY: Once out of immediate danger from our Jap pursuers, our main problem was one of physical travel through the unexplored jungles and rough terrain of Mindanao, in an effort to get to where we wanted to go. No longer were we on a starvation diet. For instance, I note

from my journal that on one morning we had a breakfast of rice, soft-boiled eggs, vegetables and coffee, all obtained from the countryside. On another morning we luxuriated over a menu containing eggs, cottage cheese, carabao meat and coffee. This was a decided contrast to our unchanging prison breakfasts of the hated lugao, concoction of rice and water. Out of sheer exuberance at once again finding food within reach, I even ate two of the Philippine baloots. This is a duck egg in which the duck has already begun to form, and which is served cold after having been boiled. To my surprise, baloots were—well, edible. In appearance they look exactly like an unborn duck in cloudy jelly, the egg having been taken away from the setting duck just before the feathers have formed.

One of the vital food items in the native economy is the carabao, a bovine of the water buffalo type which is also used as a draft animal. At several places where we stopped the natives would kill a carabao, salt the meat heavily, and after cutting it in strips place it in the sun to dry. After twelve hours or so in the Philippine sun this meat seemed to be cured, and apparently would last indefinitely.

In spite of our vastly improved food supply, we were as yet by no means free of the Japs, and there

were still a lot of hardships ahead. (As a humorous contrast to our prison conditions, a fortnight after our escape we attended a luncheon where entertainment was provided by an eleven-piece orchestra!)

On the third day out, Mellnik cut his left hand quite badly with a bolo as we were clearing a way through the jungle. It gave him trouble over most of the 40-odd days we were traveling, but he never let us slow up our journey, and we never once heard him speak of his pain.

On another occasion Marine First Lieutenant Dobervich became quite ill and was unable to retain food. We thought he had a recurring attack of malaria, although his symptoms were slightly atypical. After several days on quinine, during which he showed no change for the better, I switched him to aspirin, of which we had hoarded a small store from our Red Cross boxes. He was soon better.

One of the worst parts of our journey led through dense jungle in which we waded through water as deep as our armpits. This jungle was infested with leeches which traveled with a jack-knife motion through the water, and which attached themselves to our flesh by the score, despite our efforts to keep them off. We wore our socks outside our trousers, and then used improvised leg-

gings, but somehow the leeches got through. Once attached to the skin, they would suck out blood and puff themselves out like a balloon. The only way to remove them was to apply fire or tobacco.

Although their bite was not painful, the puncture they made in the skin was an invitation to infection. To combat the possibility of this infection I was forced to use my three piña cloth handkerchiefs as bandages and swabs. (I am not sure that my two little daughters have forgiven me for this utilitarian lapse, although they were of course overjoyed when they learned that I was alive and safe.)

On two occasions when we had almost reached our objective we were close to recapture by the Japanese. Once we were aboard a stolen fishing launch which could do about four knots, when dawn broke to reveal that we were just astern two Japanese coastal patrol vessels, armed with three-inch guns. It was too late to turn back, and any attempt to outrun the Japs would have been sheer folly. Having no alternative, we chose the course of boldness, deliberately following the Japs until they sheered to port to run into a harbor. We, of course, did not follow them into the harbor. We got the hell out of there at a very frenzied four-knot rate.

Perhaps our closest shave occurred when the

Japs landed a force of 200 men, covered by five fighter planes. On this occasion we escaped into the jungle. The planes strafed the undergrowth, but fortunately none of us was hit.

COMMANDER MCCOY AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL MELLNIK: By this time it must be obvious that there has been no attempt to detail even an approximation of the route we took through the Island of Mindanao in our escape; the reasons for these omissions should need no explanation. In addition, however, we have been careful to withhold the information of military value brought out by those of us who escaped, and which has already been placed in the proper hands.

As for the final escape itself, this is still an unfinished story as these lines are being written. At this time, not every member of our party has actually reached the States, although most have. One of the party is reported to have fallen in love with a beautiful Filipino girl, and decided to stay until after the war. Every one of the ten of us, however, is free of the Japs, and with an even break in the fortunes of war all will eventually be united with their friends and families. We all pray that this will occur, and that it will not be too long delayed. Naturally we do not intend even to hint at the manner in which we finally got clear of the Philip-

piners. It is a great pleasure to leave the Japs an entirely free field in which to guess.

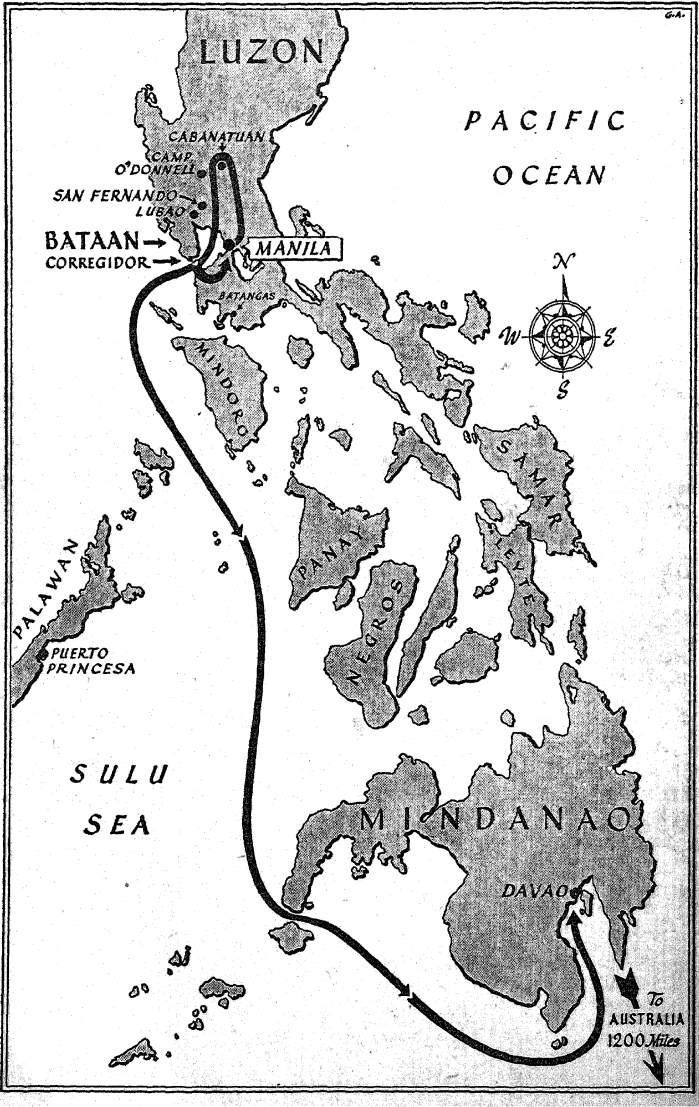
We received a right royal welcome by our Army and Navy colleagues in Australia. We are, in fact, willing to admit that, on the morning following the day of our arrival in Australia, we were not quite as chipper as we had been on the night before. It was a great celebration.

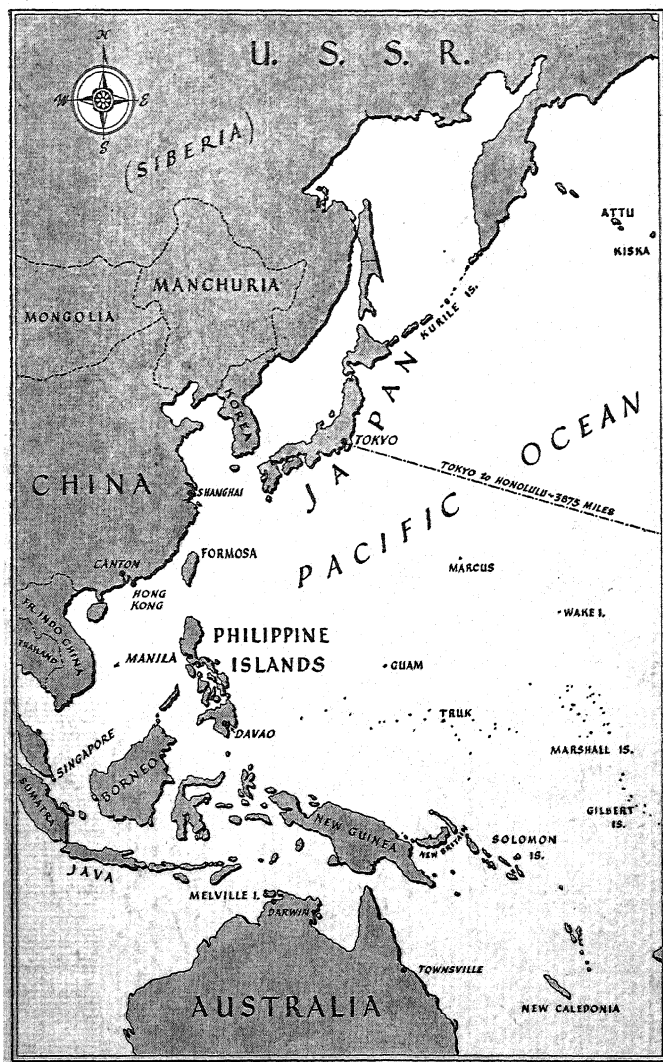
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In setting down the foregoing narrative we have made every effort to present the facts on the conservative side, although many of them would most easily lend themselves to sensationalism. We have set down nothing not seen by ourselves or told to us by a responsible officer of the United States Army, Navy or Marine Corps. We believe the facts as presented give a fair picture of the enemy we face in the Pacific.









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